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NATIONAL GUARD CELEBRATES 375TH BIRTHDAY

This week, the oldest military service in the country celebrated its 375th birthday. The National Guard began on December 13, 1636, when the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law establishing formal militia companies.

Much has changed since 1636, but one thing has not: the National Guard still consists of citizen-soldiers and airmen providing assistance during natural disasters, training regularly to uphold high standards of readiness, and deploying to far-away countries to protect the United States' national interests.

Their mission is the same as it was 375 years ago to protect and defend both community and country.

This year their commitment to state and community was evidenced by the 2,000 guardsmen that worked in support of flood protection along the Missouri River.

Today, more than 500 members of the South Dakota National Guard are serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations around the world. South Dakota has one of the highest per-capita participation rates in the war on terror, with more than 4,500 Army National Guard members and 600 Air Guard members deployed in the past decade to Iraq, Afghanistan and other overseas posts.

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AURORA COUNTY BREAKS GROUND FOR VETERANS MEMORIAL

On Wednesday, December 7, veterans and community leaders in Aurora County gathered at the Court House in Plankinton for the groundbreaking ceremony for their World War II memorial.

The design for this memorial, includes room to honor all Aurora County veterans that served in conflicts in the United States history.

Ron Falor, Aurora County VSO, participated in the groundbreaking ceremony and commended the veterans for their fundraising efforts to secure the funds necessary for the communities in Aurora County to erect a permanent memorial honoring the men and women that have donned the uniform and served this great nation.



NEW FLAG PROTOCOL AT STATE FACILITIES

The Bureau of Administration on behalf of the Governor's Office, has ordered the hanging the flags at all state facilities to be as follows: United States flag on top, followed by the POW/MIA flag, with the State of South Dakota flag placed at the bottom.

Governor Dugaard stated that although Congress had not taken action on the official placement of the POW/MIA flag when it is flown with a state flag, he supported the service organizations request to have the POW/MIA flag flown subordinate to the United States flag at state facilities.



SDSM PRESENTED SEVEN SEALS AWARD

The South Dakota School of Mines and Technology was presented the highly-coveted Seven Seals Award, recognizing its contributions to the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve volunteer mission.

The Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a volunteer organization under the Department of Defense, presented the award to Dr. Robert A. Wharton, School of Mines president, on behalf of the university Wednesday, Dec. 14.

This is the eighth award given since 2007, the first to an organization. Until now, the award has been bestowed upon seven individuals for their significant contributions and support of the ESGR mission, which is to develop and promote a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees.

Specifically, the School of Mines has supported Dr. Scott Amos, professor and graduate coordinator for civil engineering and construction management programs, in his volunteerism to the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. In his volunteer capacity, Amos is employer outreach and employment initiative director. Since joining the ESGR in January 2010 he has logged more than 700 hours working with employers who share their employees with the Department of Defense. As employer outreach coordinator Amos helps coordinate trade shows and serves as a military unit liaison, assisting in an outreach program and conducting training. He also serves as an ombudsman under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, providing education, consultation and mediation under this law.



The award is named for the seven armed forces reserve components, the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve.

Dignitaries present were Maj. Gen. Timothy A. Reisch, South Dakota's 21st Adjutant General in command of the South Dakota National Guard, and Mr. Ronald W. Mielke, who is the chair of the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve committee.

KRAUSE LEAVES GRANT COUNTY

Jesse Krause, Grant County VSO and President of the South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association, has notified the Grant County Commission that he will be leaving his position with the County effective December 22nd.

We at the Department wish Jesse the very best and sincerely thank him for his commitment to South Dakota Veterans and to the SDVSOA.

KUSSER RETIRES

Bob Kusser, director of the South Dakota National Guard Museum in Pierre, will retire from his post as director on December 31, 2011. Kusser has served as the Museum Director since June 2004.

Prior to serving as Museum director, Bob operated charter and school buses for the Western Transportation and Sturgis Bus Company in Sturgis.

The military has been a significant part of Bob's life. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1968 to 1972 (Naval Station Mayport, Florida and served aboard the aircraft carrier USS Saratoga—CV60). He is a Vietnam War Veteran. Bob served in the South Dakota Army National Guard as a Traditional Guardsmen with the HHB 147th Field Artillery in Pierre from 1973-1981. From 1981 to 1996 he served as AGR with the 842nd Engineer Company in Spearfish, the 214th Engineer Company in Hot Springs and the HHD 109th Engineer Battalion in Sturgis.

If you ask Bob about serving his country, he will tell you that he has gone places around the world and in the United States that he will never see again. He said he faced and overcame many challenges and would do it all over again.

In 2010, Bob served on the Central SD Honor Flight Committee. This Committee was successful in raising over \$100,000, to fund the World War II Veterans from central South Dakota on the 9th Honor Flight. Bob was honored to be selected as one of the guardians for that flight.

Bob is a member of the American Legion, the American Legion Riders, the VFW, the DAV and the Pierre Chamber of Commerce.

Bob has been very active in supporting operations at the Emergency Operations Center. He has served as the liaison between the Office of Emergency Management and the South Dakota National Guard; as well as supported the OEM Resource Unit.

Bob's retirement plans include reconnecting with his family in Sturgis, continue supporting emergency operations response, continue supporting the SDNG Museum, do some fishing, hunting, golfing and whatever his wife tells him to do!!!!

We at the Department wish Bob the VERY BEST!!!!!!!!!!!!



WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

More than 200 people assembled at the Black Hills National Cemetery (BHNC) Saturday morning to honor America's veterans as part of Wreaths Across America program. The Wreaths Across America campaign, a project which began in 2006, distributes holiday wreaths honoring veterans at approximately 131 Veterans Administration national and state cemeteries nationwide, as well as a number of cemeteries overseas. In total, over 700 wreaths were placed at the BHNC.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec. 16 – VABHHCS Town Hall Meeting – Pierre - Ramkota Convention Center - 10:00 am

Dec. 16 - VABHHCS Town Hall Meeting – Eagle Butte - Landmark Hall - 4:30 pm

Dec. 26—State Offices Closed

Jan. 2—State Offices Closed

Jan. 10—Legislative Session Opens

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